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NASH

Country Weekly

COUNTRY FOR LIFE | JULY 6, 2015

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*A Thousand
Horses*

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MUSGRAVES**

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**EASTON
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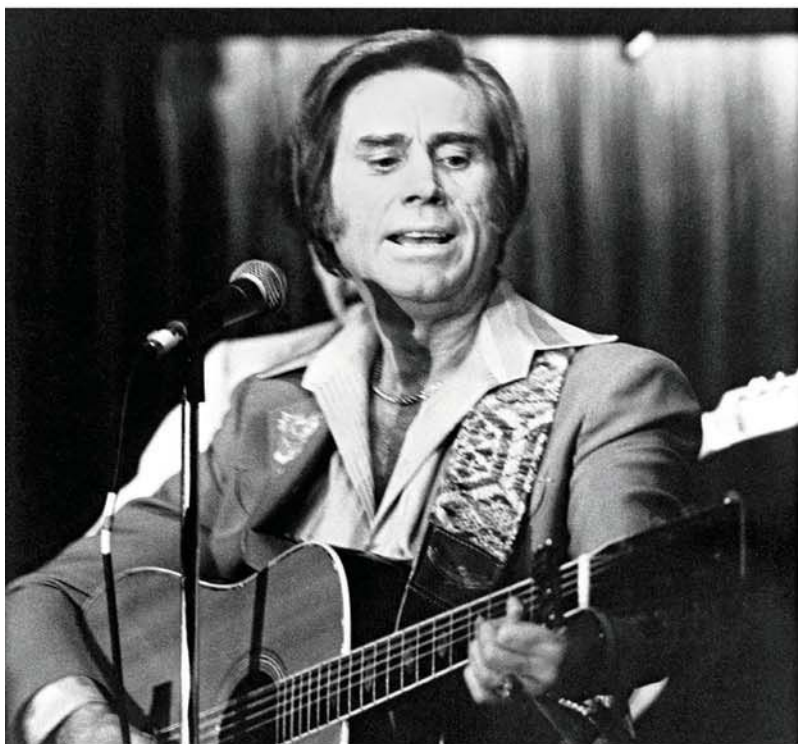
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THIS WEEK IN COUNTRY MUSIC...

1980 **SATURDAY,
JULY 5**



No Stopping This

GEORGE JONES lost a bet—but ended up winning in the long run. The wager was over a song called “He Stopped Loving Her Today,” which touchingly described a man who had not given up on his true love, hoping one day that she would return. In the end, it’s dramatically revealed that the man has indeed stopped loving her—because he’s passed away. George deemed the song “morbid,” among other more colorful adjectives, and bet his producer Billy Sherrill that the tune would never hit No. 1. Co-writer Bobby Braddock, who penned the song with Curly Putman, once recalled writing that key final verse to *Country Weekly*. “What I remember is that Billy told us he wanted it,” Bobby said. “And actually, Curly and I had written such a verse and we found it and took it back to Billy. He said that it was sort of in the ballpark but not exactly what he wanted.” Curly and Bobby finally wrote one that met with everyone’s approval. “He Stopped Loving Her Today,” featuring George’s achingly plaintive vocal, reached the No. 1 spot on July 5, 1980, meaning, of course, that George had to pay up on the bet. But he gained a lifelong hit. “He Stopped Loving Her Today” is widely considered the greatest country song ever written, and this year we celebrate the 35th anniversary of its release and No. 1 success.

George by Chris Walter/Getty Images; ZBB by Kevin Winter/Getty Images; Rodney by Harry Black/Corbis

2015



**JUNE
30: GO
EASTON
CORBIN**

releases his
long-awaited

new album, *About to Get Real*, on June 30. The album features Easton’s current hit single, the irresistible “Baby Be My Love Song.”



JULY 3: CATCH ZAC

ZAC BROWN BAND will get the holiday fireworks started early when they play Coors Field in Denver on July 3. The date is part of the band’s current Jekyll + Hyde Tour.

JULY 2-4: JAM ON

Spend the weekend in Varysburg, N.Y., for Jam in the Valley, western New York’s oldest festival. Among the stars on the bill: **THE BAND PERRY**, **CHRIS YOUNG**, **PARMALEE** and **JERROD NIEMANN**.

JULY 4: BOOM!

Celebrate America’s birthday right in your own home with the Macy’s 4th of July Fireworks Spectacular, airing live on NBC on July 4 at 8 p.m. ET. You’ll hear music from **RODNEY ATKINS**, Gloria Estefan, gospel great Cece Winans and others while

enjoying a fireworks extravaganza that truly lives up to the show’s title.



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July 6, 2015

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Get set for some unpredictable fun as the singer gets her own reality TV show.

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Looking for some “Real Life” advice? He’s got the answers to a variety of pertinent questions.

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His new album keeps it traditional with a forward-looking glance.

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The *Nashville* star plays a singer on TV—now he has his own single and upcoming album.

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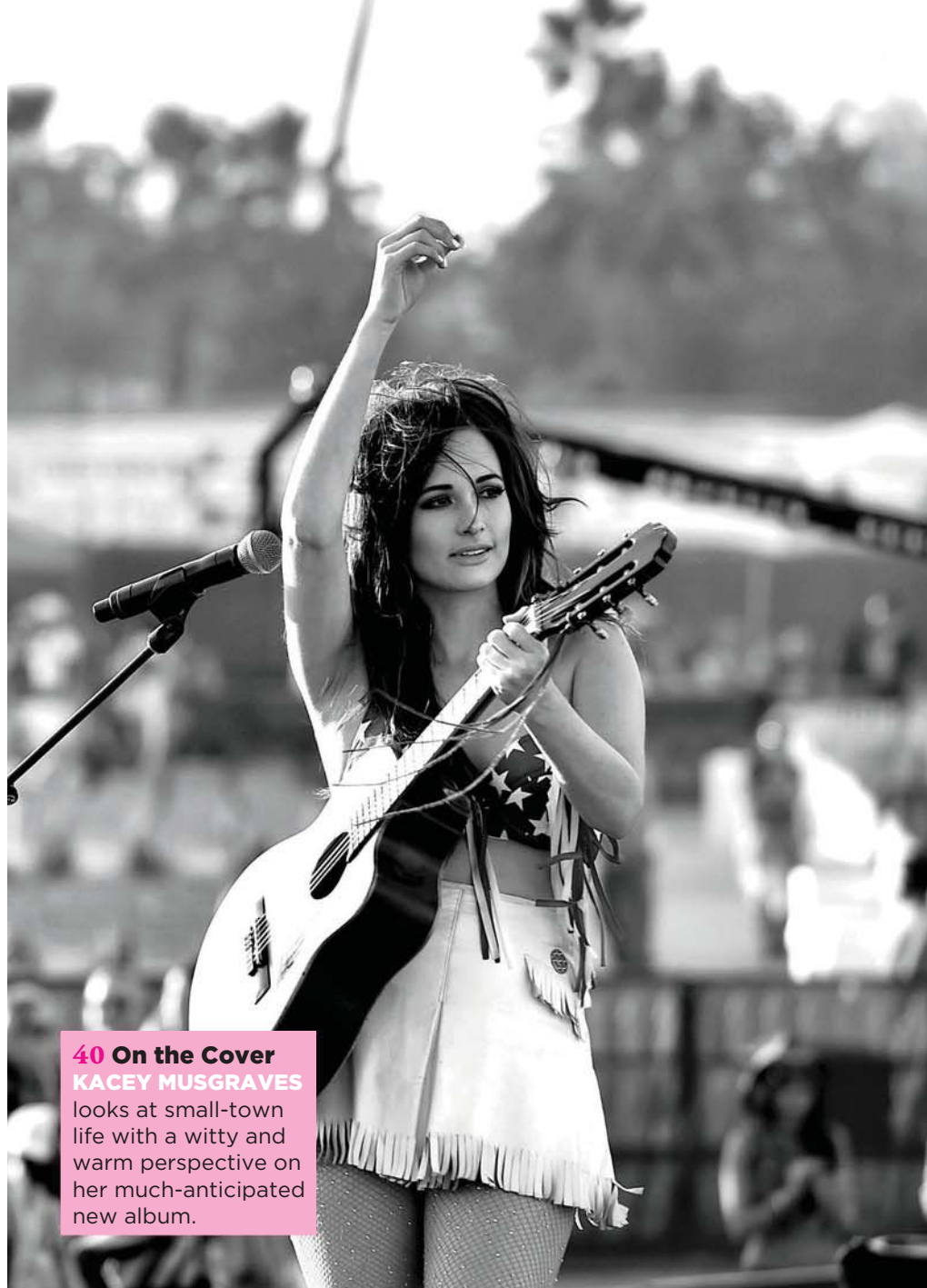
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40 On the Cover
KACEY MUSGRAVES
looks at small-town life with a witty and warm perspective on her much-anticipated new album.

PLUS!

NASH
NEXT

27 Southern rockers **A THOUSAND HORSES** came up paying their dues, and now that’s paying off with a No. 1 single, debut album and a sudden flurry of tour dates. Find out how they’ve galloped into the big time.



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Key by Kevin Winter/Getty Images; ATH by David McClister/EB Media
On Cover: Kacey by Kelly Christine Sutton/Sandbox Entertainment

A man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a black leather motorcycle jacket over a white t-shirt and dark jeans, stands in a field of tall grass under a clear blue sky. He is looking off to the side with a slight smile.

CARNAHAN SMITH

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FROM THE EDITOR



Dear Readers,

There is a lot of buzz surrounding singer/songwriter Kacey Musgraves these days. I personally find this woman fascinating with a touch of mystique. Her songs are more country-sounding than many out there, yet she's not scoring hits on radio. She's not concerned with others' perceptions of her and she sees all people equally. What's not to love? Simply put, Kacey Musgraves is a breath of fresh air. That's why I chose to have her on this week's

cover. Our managing editor, Jon Freeman, got a great interview with her that gives a lot of insight into just who Kacey Musgraves is and why country music needs her.

In this week's NASH Next section we spotlight a new group that has seen their debut single, "Smoke," hit the No. 1 spot on the *Billboard* Country Airplay chart. And as the writer, Chris Parton, points out in the story, they're the first group of three or more members to do that since Zac Brown Band and "Chicken Fried" did it back in 2008. You could say that this group is bringing that Southern-rock charm back into country. So saddle up and get to know more about the band called A Thousand Horses.

Don't miss next week's issue, on stands July 6, as we get to see what makes Darius Rucker tick.

SEE YOU NEXT WEEK!

LISA KONICKI, EDITOR IN CHIEF

CORRECTION

In our June 15 cover story on Sam Hunt ["Game Changer"] we misidentified Sam's tour manager John Worthington as his band member Josh Sales. The correct caption should read, "(From left) Sam's tour manager John Worthington, Sam, Tyrone Carreker and Josh Burkett." NCW regrets the error.




FROM THE READER

Shoot us an email, a comment or a tweet and let us know what you think!



HAPPY ENDING, NEW BEGINNINGS

Thank you for the last, official "Country Weekly" cover [June 8] featuring King George Strait! It's fitting that he's in this one, having graced more covers than any other artist . . . and I have every single one of them! The feature story on some of his hits is cool. "Blue Clear Sky" is my favorite Strait song and I'm delighted you featured that one. Strait fans are forever grateful for your unwavering support of Mr. Strait's career, and especially now, featuring his new single, "Let It Go," from his upcoming album, which his website says will be released in the fall of 2015. Thanks for all the photos, stories and memories . . . and the best of luck with the new *Nash Country Weekly*.

 **SYLVIA CONNOR**
Miami

EDITOR'S REPLY: *Thank you for your letter, Sylvia. We agree it was fitting for George to be on the last cover before the change, but I assure you, you haven't seen the last of George. We will definitely continue to cover him and many other legendary artists as Nash Country Weekly moves forward. Thanks for reading.*

TWITTER

Finally found this @SamHuntMusic at Walmart I went to 10 stores till I finally found him!!!

 **ROSE**
@azswiftiecat

Oh . . . hey! @countryweekly thanks for the article on one of my fav tomatoes @KelseaBallerini love her!

 **EMILY CONNER**
@socccergurl42

FACEBOOK

You "old-timers" sure have a lot of class!!!! What a beautiful tribute you gave to Jim Ed in his final days. Bless all of you!!!!

 **BRENDA COFFIN**
SCHAFFER

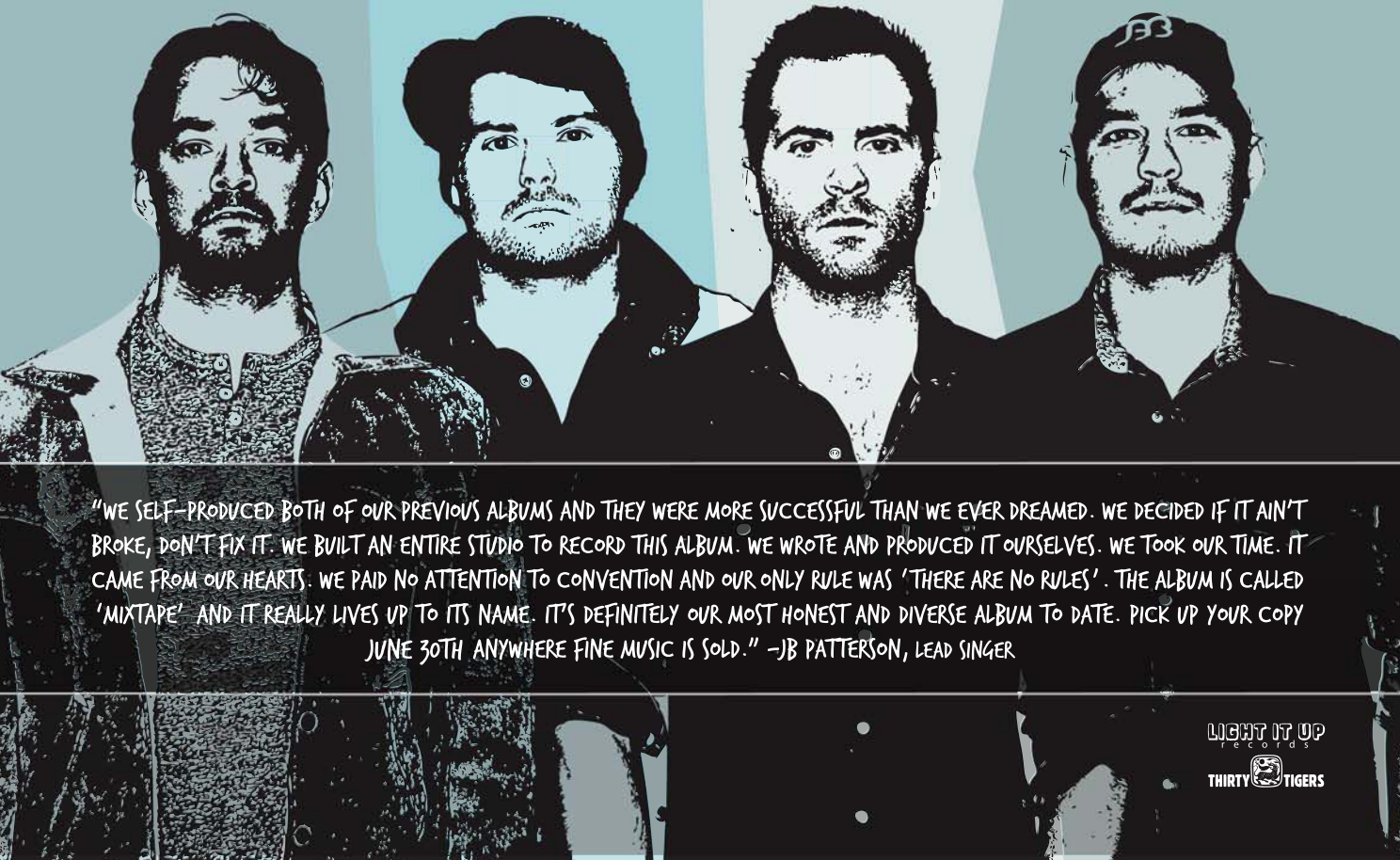
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HOW CAN I MISS YOU
LIGHT IT UP
CLOSE ENOUGH TO HEAVEN
WAGON
KEEP A COUPLE BEERS COLD
GOOD LORD'S GRACE
MESS OUTTA ME
WHERE'S WOODY GUTHRIE
BACK WHEN WE WERE KIDS



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LIGHT IT UP
records
THIRTY  TIGERS

FIRST TAKE

SHOTGUN SIPPERS

Dierks Bentley (right) and a thirsty fan shotgun a couple of beers onstage at the Shaky Boots Music Festival in Atlanta in May.



photo by Debby Wong/Corbis



THE COUNTRY BREW

A SWEET TASTE OF ALL THINGS COUNTRY

Opening Act



LET FREEDOM RING

Nashville's Fourth of July celebration, Let Freedom Sing, is always one of the hottest, most star-powered in the country, and that's red-white-and-blue true for this year.

MARTINA McBRIDE will headline the annual concert on Nashville's riverfront, with additional performances from the renowned Nashville Symphony and R&B singer Mikky Ekko. Plus, there's the fabulous fireworks display, choreographed to the stirring sounds of the Nashville Symphony and ranked as one of America's most dazzling pyro shows. If you're in town for the Fourth, you won't want to miss this family-friendly event in the heart of downtown Nashville.

Illustration by Drew Bardana



(Clockwise from above) **DUSTY BOTTOMS** (from left) Dustin Lynch, Luke Bryan and Randy Houser look like three amigos during the first week of Luke's Kick the Dust Up Tour; **GATLIN GUNNER** Larry Gatlin greets a soldier as he enters the Grand Ole Opry before the Salute to the Troops showcase; **DOOBIE DOO** (from left) BMLG president Scott Borchetta, Tom Johnston, Martina McBride, Patrick Simmons, Meghan Trainor and John McFee attend the Music Biz 2015 Awards on May 14 in Nashville.



SALUTE TO EXCELLENCE The Grand Ole Opry's Salute to the Troops showcase featured an all-star group of performances and meet-and-greet opportunities, including the MusiCorps Wounded Warrior Band, (below, from left) Craig Morgan, Trace Adkins and Lee Greenwood and (bottom right) Kellie Pickler.



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spectacular large carat weight jewelry. "It's just recently that luxury jewelers have fallen in love with helenite," says James Fent, GIA certified gemologist. "Clear green color in a stone this size is rarely found in emeralds but helenite has come to the rescue."

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(Right) **DRIVIN' ON THE EDGE** Alan Jackson (left) and Steven Tyler take a ride in a "Guuber" for a skit during the CMT Music Awards; (below) **HITMAKER** Joe Nichols (second from left) compares nicks after taking batting practice with the St. Louis Cardinals; (below right) **VETERAN MOVE** Staff Sergeant Justin Patterson (left) presents Brantley Gilbert with his Purple Heart as a show of gratitude for Brantley's work with the Wounded Warrior Project.



(Above) **HELI COOL** Kristian Bush (wearing his trademark fedora) poses with the Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron Five One WARLORDS during his trip to Japan; (left) **SMILING SWIFTIES** Thomas Rhett and his wife, Lauren, attend Taylor Swift's 1989 World Tour in Louisville, Ky.



(Above) **MORK & TERRI** Terri Clark has a new addition to her family, Rigby, a Morkie breed, which is a cross between a Yorkshire terrier and a Maltese; (below) **RUB-A-DUB-DUB** Faith Hill packs a tub for Operation Troop Aid in support of the Tug McGraw Foundation; (bottom) **SUPER TROOPER** Reba McEntire greets a fan, soldier Paul Jordan, who was on his way back to serve in Afghanistan.



Alan & Steven courtesy Steven Tyler Instagram; Joe & Cardinals courtesy Joe Nichols Instagram; Justin & Brantley courtesy The Valley Music Group; Thomas & Lauren courtesy Thomas Rhett Instagram; Kristian & military courtesy Kristian Bush Instagram; Terri & Rigby courtesy Terri Clark Instagram; Faith & Reba courtesy Faith Hill Instagram; Paul & Reba courtesy Reba McEntire Instagram

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CELEBRATION STATION

Light the fireworks because **LITTLE BIG TOWN** is ready to celebrate the Fourth of July in style this year as hosts of Westwood One's Celebrate the U.S.A country music special. In honor of America's 239th birthday, Little Big Town will host an

exclusive music special alongside some of country's biggest stars, including **LUKE BRYAN, KENNY CHESNEY, MIRANDA LAMBERT, FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE, KEITH URBAN, JASON ALDEAN, CARRIE UNDERWOOD, ERIC CHURCH**



and more. These country superstars will break out some cool tunes, play patriotic classics and share their favorite Fourth of July memories. Stations can air Westwood One's holiday special anytime from Friday, July 3, through Sunday, July 5, 2015, between 6 a.m. and midnight.

DOG GONE IT!

A well-deserved family beach vacation almost ended in disaster when **HANK**, the dog belonging to **JUSTIN MOORE** and his family, ran off the day the Moores were set to return to Georgia. A frantic Justin turned to social media for help, tweeting that



they may have fans vacationing in the area and if anyone should find the Westie/Scottie mix to email him. Sure enough, the next

morning Justin received a message on his Facebook page from a **PAIR OF GOOD SAMARITANS** who found the lucky pup.





NAMM FOR THE PEOPLE

The summer NAMM trade show hits Nashville July 8-11 at Music City Center with a dazzling array of new music merchandise, gear, electronic equipment and everything else a musician needs. The show is for industry members and registrants only, with one exception. The final day, Saturday, July 11, is Music Industry Day, when musicians and fans get the opportunity to attend workshops, catch demos of new instruments and products, enjoy live performances from **DUSTIN LYNCH** and other acts and network with industry pros. You can attend Music Industry Day, which runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on July 11, for only \$20 at the door. Or you can order a ticket before the day of the event for \$10 at namm.org/musicindustryday. If you're a musician, gearhead or just an avid music fan, this day's for you.

COWBOY UP and ENTER TO WIN!

You could win a Wrangler Western shirt autographed by **GEORGE STRAIT**—the same style shirt George wore on the last night of his Cowboy Rides Away Tour in Arlington, Texas.

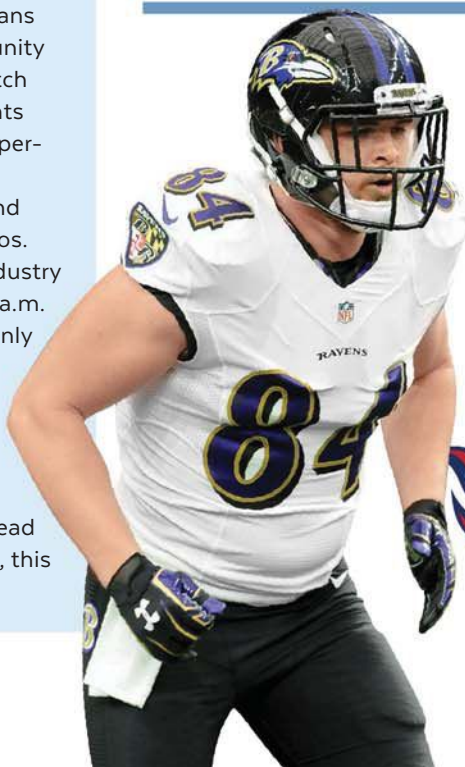
To enter, visit CountryWeekly.com. Contest deadline is July 10. Good luck! But even if you don't win this collectible shirt, you can still dress like King George. For a limited time, this style is back in the George Strait signature collection on wrangler.com.

VOID WHERE PROHIBITED. WINNER CHOSEN AT RANDOM.



BLAZING A TRAIL

The Mississippi Country Music Trail recently unveiled its first out-of-state marker at Nashville's Big Loud Shirt Industries, a publishing company established by award-winning songwriter and producer **CRAIG WISEMAN**, who is also a Mississippi native. The new designation on the trail, which seeks to enlighten the public about Mississippi's vast country music contributions, is the 29th marker and honors the likes of **CONWAY TWITTY, JIMMIE RODGERS, HANK COCHRAN, CHARLEY PRIDE, CHRIS LeDOUX** and more.



TITAN UP

If you are a fan of country music from the '90s, you no doubt remember **DOUG SUPERNAW**, who had hits with "Reno," "I Don't Call Him Daddy"



and "Not Enough Hours in the Night." Doug has experienced his share of hardships and has since returned to Texas, where he performs locally, but recently he shared the good news that his son, **PHILLIP SUPERNAW**, has signed with the NFL's Tennessee Titans as a tight end.



FOREVER MY DARLING

The U.S. Postal Service is bringing **ELVIS PRESLEY** back for an encore. *After being featured on a post-*

age stamp in 1993, Elvis is returning to envelops this summer with a Forever stamp as part of the Music Icons series, which has honored musicians Johnny Cash, Lydia Mendoza, Ray Charles, Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix since

its inception in 2013. The stamp will be released on Aug. 12, with a first-day-of-issue dedication ceremony to be held at Memphis' Graceland as part of the Elvis Week festivities.



COOL CATS



To coincide with the current Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum exhibit, **DYLAN, CASH AND THE NASHVILLE CATS: A NEW MUSIC CITY**, Legacy Recordings has released a two-disc album of the same name. *Dylan, Cash and the Nashville Cats* features a previously unreleased version of **BOB DYLAN's** "If Not for You," as well as 35 other tracks from artists including **JOHNNY CASH, KRIS KRISTOFFERSON, THE BYRDS, PAUL McCARTNEY & WINGS** and more.

DISC 1

1. "Absolutely Sweet Marie"
by Bob Dylan
2. "Harpoon Man"
by Charlie McCoy & the Escorts
3. "It Ain't Me, Babe"
by Johnny Cash
4. "Down in the Flood"
by Flatt & Scruggs
5. "The Way I Feel"
by Gordon Lightfoot
6. "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight"
by Bob Dylan
7. "You Ain't Goin' Nowhere"
by The Byrds
8. "This Wheel's on Fire"
by Ian & Sylvia
9. "Gentle on My Mind"
by John Hartford
10. "Some of Shelly's Blues"
by The Monkees
11. "Turn Around"
by The Beau Brummels
12. "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry"
by Tracy Nelson
13. "If You Don't Like Hank Williams"
by Kris Kristofferson
14. "Bird on the Wire"
by Leonard Cohen
15. "Hickory Wind"
by The Byrds
16. "Blowing Down That Dusty Road"
by Country Joe McDonald
17. "The Boxer"
by Simon & Garfunkel
18. "Stone Fox Chase"
by Area Code 615
19. "The Byrds Sweetheart of the Rodeo Radio Ad"

DISC 2

1. "Girl From the North Country"
by Bob Dylan with Johnny Cash
2. "Driftin' Way of Life"
by Jerry Jeff Walker
3. "Behind That Locked Door"
by George Harrison
4. "Crazy Mama"
by J.J. Cale
5. "Beaucoups of Blues"
by Ringo Starr
6. "Going to the Country"
by Steve Miller Band
7. "Heart of Gold"
by Neil Young
8. "If Not for You"
by Bob Dylan with Lloyd Green
9. "City of New Orleans"
by Steve Goodman
10. "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down"
by Joan Baez
11. "Blue River"
by Eric Andersen
12. "Seven Bridges Road"
by Steve Young
13. "Will the Circle Be Unbroken"
by Nitty Gritty Dirt Band
14. "Sally G"
by Paul McCartney & Wings
15. "Silver Wings"
by Earl Scruggs with Linda Ronstadt
16. "A Six Pack to Go"
by Leon Russell (as Hank Wilson)
17. "Matchbox"
by Derek & The Dominos with Johnny Cash and Carl Perkins

GET TO
KNOW
*The
Cadillac
Three*

(From left) Kelby Ray, Jaren Johnston and Neil Mason

PHOTOGRAPH BY JIM WRIGHT FOR UNK NASHVILLE

Austin's wedding.

key courtesy UMG Nashville; Canaan by Jim Wright/UMG Nashville

Tell us about
*The Amazing
Race.*

TRUFFLE TREAT

TV's *MasterChef* celebrates a milestone with a creative take on birthday cake.

It's a *MasterChef* milestone! On July 1, FOX's long-running cooking competition celebrates its



100th episode, where contestants will create a three-layer birthday cake. To help mark the occasion,

show judge **CHRISTINA TOSI** is preparing one of her specialties, birthday cake truffles, and you can follow her recipe right here.

Check out *MasterChef* on Wednesday nights at 8 p.m. ET on FOX. **BOB PAXMAN**



Birthday Cake Truffles

Makes about one dozen 1-ounce balls

3 cups cake scraps (the fresher the better)

2-4 tbsp. vanilla milk (¼ cup milk and 1 tsp. clear vanilla extract)

3 ounces white chocolate, melted

1 cup birthday cake sand (see directions)

FOR BIRTHDAY CAKE SAND:

¼ cup granulated sugar

1 tsp. tightly packed light brown sugar

¾ cup cake flour

¼ tsp. baking powder

¼ tsp. kosher salt

1 tbsp. rainbow sprinkles

1 tbsp. grapeseed oil

1 tsp. clear vanilla extract

FOR SAND:

HEAT the oven to 300°. **COMBINE** the sugars, flour, baking powder, salt and sprinkles in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment and **MIX** on low speed until well combined.

ADD the oil and vanilla and paddle again to distribute and form small sandy clusters. Let the crumbs cool completely before using. Grind down in a food processor if crumbs are not small or sandy enough.

FOR TRUFFLES:

COMBINE cake scraps and vanilla milk in medium-sized bowl and **TOSS** with your hands until moist enough to knead into a ball.

Using a small ice cream scoop, portion out 12 balls, each half the size of a ping-pong ball. **ROLL** one between the palms of your hands and shape it into a round sphere.

Put 2 tbsp. of the white chocolate in the palm of your hands (with latex gloves on) and roll each ball between your palms, coating it in a thin layer of melted chocolate.

Put 3 or 4 chocolate-covered balls at a time into the bowl of birthday cake sand. Immediately **TOSS** them with the crumbs to coat, before the chocolate shell sets.

Refrigerate for at least 5 minutes to fully set the chocolate shells before eating or storing.

FIRST-EVER Thomas Kinkadee Art Glass Pumpkin

with hand-crafted sculpture, lights and rotation!

"Reflections of a Harvest Season"

- ✿ Multimedia masterpiece expertly crafted of hand-cut art glass
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- ✿ Mahogany-finished base features a weathered stone-paved trail traveled by two old-fashioned horse-drawn carts in motion
- ✿ With the flip of a switch, the village lights up inside the pumpkin as the horses pull their hay-filled wagons around the base



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Who Wore It Best?



◀ *Carrie Underwood*

Carrie wore a white Ashdan gown to walk the red carpet at the inaugural American Country Countdown Awards in December. She accessorized with jewelry from L'Dezen and a clutch from Emm Kuo.

Nancy O'Dell ▶

The *Entertainment Tonight* co-host chose the same Ashdan gown in black for the red carpet festivities at this year's Academy of Country Music Awards. Her accessories came from XIV Karats in Beverly Hills.



Carrie by Curtis Hilburn/AFF; Nancy by Paul A. Hebert/Corbis

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**NASH Country
Weekly**

COUNTRY FOR LIFE



Albums

The Oak Ridge Boys

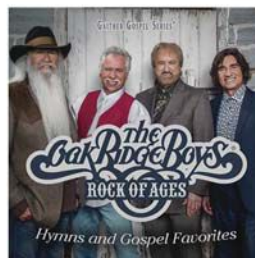
Rock of Ages

GAITHER MUSIC GROUP

B+

There's a really good reason that The Oak Ridge Boys are still a relevant act in country music. The quartet, in their current configuration—Duane Allen (lead), Joe Bonsall (tenor), William Lee Golden (baritone) and Richard Sterban (bass)—has been performing together for more than 40 years. That explains their seamless harmonies and palpable chemistry. And while you may know them best for songs like “Y’all Come Back Saloon,” “Leaving Louisiana in the Broad Daylight” and, of course, “Elvira,” the group got their start

singing gospel music. They, once again, return to those religious roots with *Rock of Ages*, the follow-up to 2012’s *Back Home Again: Gospel Favorites*. Can I get an amen? This 15-song collection takes listeners to church with longtime Southern gospel favorites like “In the Sweet By and By,” “There Is Power in the Blood” and “Blessed Assurance,” presented in their traditional glory with complementary arrangements and those heavenly harmonies we expect from the Oaks. But the group, shepherded by producers Ben Isaacs and Duane Allen, takes some fun chances and creative license with tunes like “Father, I Stretch My Hands to Thee,” which is given an up-kick in tempo, and “Just a Little Talk With



Jesus,” which has a touch, just a touch now, of a rock groove. And while 13 of the tunes will ring familiar with most gospel music fans, two tracks are more contemporary: the Merle Haggard and Kenny

Vernon original “Sweet Jesus,” which spotlights Merle in the recitation, and the album’s closer, “Peace Within,” written by Susan Taylor, Dickey Lee and Allen Reynolds, and featuring ethereal vocal embellishment from The Isaacs.

LONG STORY SHORT: While it doesn’t replace a Sunday morning service and picnic on the grounds, *Rock of Ages* can certainly get the Spirit moving every other day of the week. **TAMMY RAGUSA**

WHAT'S SPINNING at NCW

We took a peek at Editor in Chief **LISA KONICKI**'s work playlist to see what was helping her get through the day.

"XO"

KELSEA BALLERINI
THE FIRST TIME

"Girl Crush"

LITTLE BIG TOWN
PAIN KILLER

"Shotgun Rider"

TIM MCGRAW
SUNDOWN HEAVEN
TOWN

"I Know You Won't"

CARRIE
UNDERWOOD
CARNIVAL RIDE

"Wasting All These Tears"

CASSADEE POPE
FRAME BY FRAME

"Stay"

SUGARLAND
ENJOY THE RIDE

"She Don't Love You"

ERIC PASLAY
ERIC PASLAY

"Anything Goes"

RANDY HOUSER
ANYTHING GOES

"I Hold On"

DIERKS BENTLEY
RISER

"Follow Your Arrow"

KACEY MUSGRAVES
SAME TRAILER
DIFFERENT PARK

"Blank Space"

TAYLOR SWIFT
1989



Old Dominion "Break Up With Him"

RCA

B+

If you own Old Dominion's self-titled EP, then you know that this very talented band is multidimensional, and their new

single, "Break Up With Him," reveals just another facet. Recitations are hot in country music right now, and Old Dominion has found a way to incorporate that trend while still maintaining their signature swagger in a fun song that vehemently opposes cheating, but does encourage a breakup . . . for a good reason. **T.R.**



Easton Corbin *About to Get Real* MERCURY RECORDS

C

You know you're in deep trouble when something as banal as "Baby Be My Love Song" is the best thing on the record. You can fairly well predict the rest just by glancing at the titles: "Diggin' on You," "Yup," "Wild Women and Whiskey" among them. And one hardly needs a degree to ascertain the subject matter: just look for key phrases like *drop a tailgate down, Fireball whiskey, order up a double* and on . . . and on. Easton is a fine, pleasant vocalist, but this material simply doesn't suit him. **BOB PAXMAN**

clude "Stompin' Grounds" and "Hole in a Bottle." The album's real kicker, "Bronco," is a stripped-down tearjerker about his older brother, Nathaniel, who died in a car crash when Canaan was 12. However, a handful of songs, including "Mad Love," "Fire" and "Gettin' Into" are rather forgettable, with the unimaginative lyrics (*Can I get another sip of them Fireball lips*) and overproduction that have become staple fodder for the bros. **JIM CASEY**



Gloriana *Three*

WARNER MUSIC NASHVILLE

C

As inspiring as Gloriana's story of survival is, it doesn't really say much in their favor that the trio is largely betting on trends started by their fellow artists for their appropriately titled third album, *Three*. Production gimmickry (loops, samples, shouts) distracts from the decent songs, like "Nobody but You" and "It Won't Let Go," but too often the songs are just reproductions of more popular tunes about bonfires and bars. Even lead single "Trouble" can't seem to muster much more than manufactured rage. Sorry, guys, the third time isn't the charm. **JON FREEMAN**



Canaan Smith *Bronco*

MERCURY NASHVILLE

B-

If all you know about Canaan Smith is that he was on the 15th season of *The Amazing Race*, his debut album, *Bronco*, should help give you an idea of where the 32-year-old comes from and what he's all about. The 13-song offering, of which the dulcet-voiced Canaan co-wrote 10, is like a paint-by-number slice of his life. The lively tracks in-



Shania Twain

Rock This Country Tour

OPENING ACT:
GAVIN DeGRAW

JULY 1

Uniondale, N.Y.
Nassau Coliseum

JULY 3

Uncasville, Conn.
Mohegan Sun

JULY 7

Newark, N.J.
Prudential Center

JULY 8

Boston
TD Garden

JULY 10

Pittsburgh
Consol Energy Center

JULY 11

Grand Rapids, Mich.
Van Andel Arena

JULY 13

Indianapolis
Bankers Life Fieldhouse

JULY 15

Jacksonville, Fla.
Jacksonville Veterans Memorial

JULY 16

Miami
American Airlines Arena

JULY 18

Greenville, S.C.
Bon Secours Wellness Arena

JULY 19

Charlotte, N.C.
Time Warner Cable Arena

JULY 21

Washington, D.C.
Verizon Center

JULY 22

Philadelphia
Wells Fargo Center

JULY 25

Auburn Hills, Mich.
Palace of Auburn Hills

JULY 26

Moline, Ill.
iWireless Center

JULY 28

Minneapolis
Target Center

JULY 29

Rosemont, Ill.
Allstate Arena

JULY 31

Nashville
Bridgestone Arena

AUG. 1

Atlanta
Philips Arena

AUG. 3

Louisville, Ky.
KFC Yum! Center

AUG. 4

St. Louis
Scottrade Center

AUG. 6

Des Moines, Iowa
Wells Fargo Arena

AUG. 7

Kansas City, Mo.
Sprint Center

AUG. 9

Austin, Texas
Frank Erwin Center

AUG. 10

Dallas
American Airlines Center

AUG. 12

Oklahoma City
Chesapeake Energy Arena

AUG. 14

Denver
Pepsi Center

AUG. 15

Salt Lake City
Energy Solutions Arena

AUG. 17

San Jose, Calif.
SAP Center

AUG. 19

Anaheim, Calif.
Honda Center

AUG. 20

Los Angeles
Staples Center

AUG. 22

San Diego
Valley View Casino Center

AMBER HAYES



Current Single
“Running Out of Memories”

Hometown
Weleetka, Okla.

Influences
Reba McEntire, Dolly Parton, Barbara Mandrell

In Brief

Amber was once a finalist for *The Mickey Mouse Club* and has had her music featured in the CW series *Hart of Dixie*. Recently, her uncle Bennie G. Adkins was presented with the Medal of Honor for his courageous actions during the Vietnam

War and she wrote a song called “Hero’s Heart” to honor him.

Hero’s Welcome

“I had a hard time getting through [‘Hero’s Heart’] the first time I sang it, because he cried. To see somebody so strong and so proud, to be able to see him have that emotion and know that was coming from me and it was all about him, I think he totally appreciated it.”

Cabin Fever

“‘Running Out of Memories’ I wrote with JP [Williams] and Bill [DeLuigi].

We were going on a writers’ retreat in East Tennessee just to get away and write specifically for [my] EP. I’m a little bit of a Pinterest addict. It’s what I do to wind down at night if I’m not reading. I’ll get on Pinterest and look, and I saw this quote about running out of memories, and I thought, ‘Hmm, that’s a cool title.’ I threw that out to them on the way to our cabin and they were like, ‘Yeah, that’s cool.’ By the time we got to the cabin, we had most of the chorus done and it was the first song we wrote on that trip

and it happened to be the first single.”

Hard Day’s Work

“We’re always looking for opportunities to pitch our songs to movie and TV, and that’s what happened with *Hart of Dixie* and other situations like that. With *Hart of Dixie*, it’s on the Netflix version of it. That placement was probably three years ago now, and I’ll get people who will text me and say, ‘Hey, did you know that your song was in *Hart of Dixie*?’ I’m like, ‘Yeah, I knew!’ It’s cool to see your music live on through that stuff.”

CRAIG CAMPBELL

On the heels of releasing his first single, "Tomorrow Tonight," from his upcoming album, Craig Campbell sat down with *Nash Country Weekly* to share some other "firsts" in his life.
ALANNA CONAWAY

FIRST CONCERT:

Vince Gill, Patty Loveless and Bryan White in Statesboro, Georgia. It was great!

FIRST DATE:

I met one of my elementary school girlfriends at the movies. Her name was Corinne Collins.

FIRST KISS:

Jennifer Wilson. I was 14. I was at a friend's birthday party.

FIRST MUSIC TEACHER:

Ms. Summers. She was a piano teacher at my elementary school.

FIRST CAR:

1991 GMC Sonoma.

FIRST STREET YOU LIVED ON:

Skyline Boulevard.

FIRST SONG YOU EVER LEARNED HOW TO PLAY ON GUITAR:

"Today I Started Loving You Again" by Merle Haggard.

FIRST DRINK:

Had to have been some sort of beer . . . St. Ides.

FIRST TATTOO:

I have one on my belly.

FIRST TIME YOU LEFT HOME:

Officially, I guess I was 19 years old. I decided I wanted to move as close as I could to Nashville. I was working for the Department of Corrections, so I transferred to a prison as far north as I could go in Georgia and stayed there for a whole day, and then I moved back home.

FIRST TIME YOU HEARD YOURSELF ON RADIO:

WUSY in Chattanooga. I was coming back from a radio tour visit. We had lost the Atlanta station, so we flipped it over to US-101 in Chattanooga. Five or six minutes later, we heard it on the radio. It was one of those moments of, "Did somebody put a CD in?" Once we realized it was on the radio, we turned it up, singing at the top of our lungs like a bunch of idiots. I still do that to this day.



photo by Rick Diamond/Getty Images

NASH NEXT

NEW ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

A THOUSAND HORSES

How country's
newest Southern
rock band is
rising above
the "Smoke"



An American Band

QUICKLY RISING FOURSOME
A THOUSAND HORSES
GOT TO THE TOP THE HARD WAY:
LOTS OF SWEAT, MILES AND
MAXED-OUT CREDIT CARDS.

story by Chris Parton

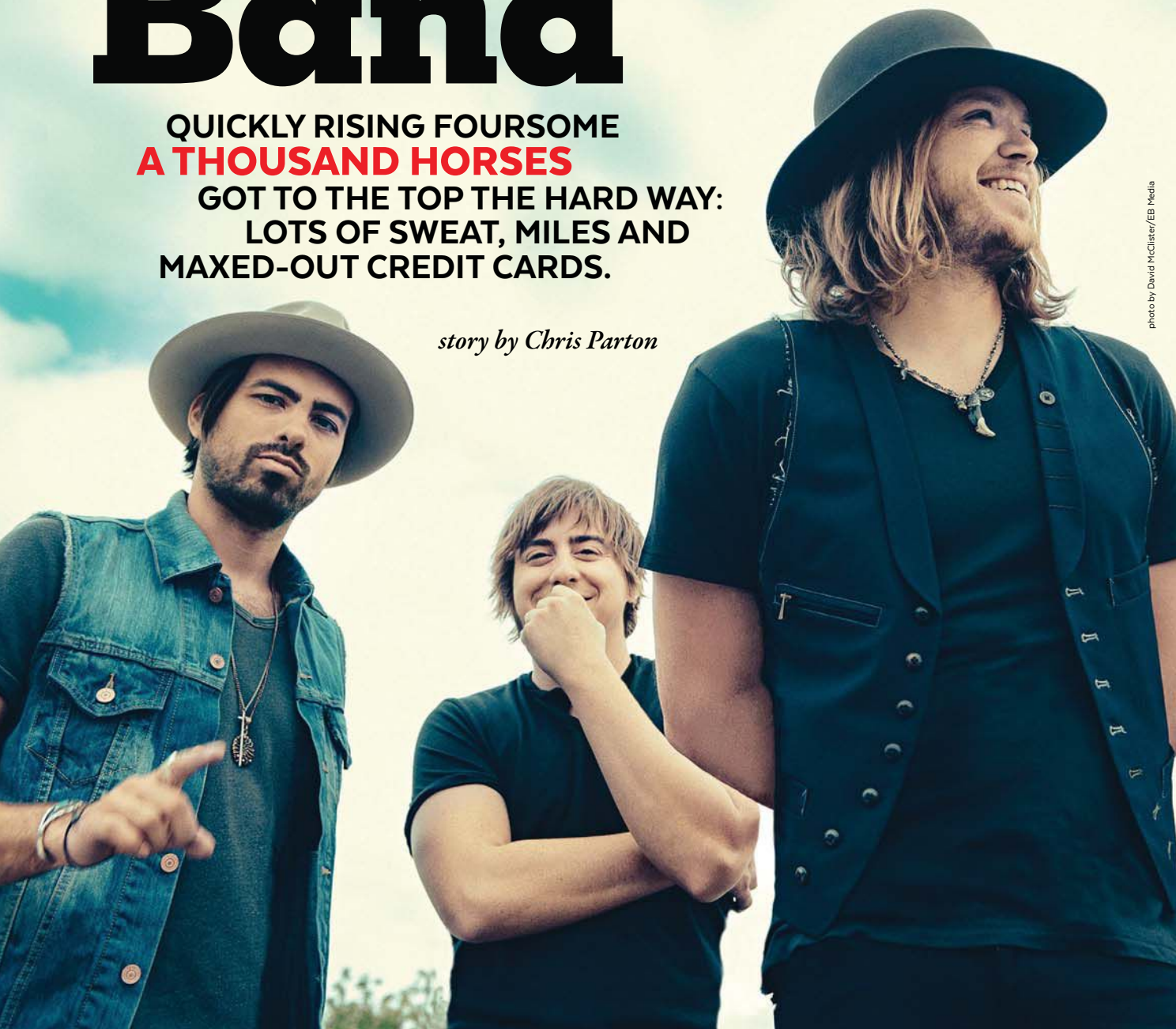


photo by David McClister/EB Media



A

Thousand Horses has arrived on the country scene just like their name suggests: a thundering stampede that chased their addictive debut single, "Smoke," all the way to No. 1 on *Billboard*'s Country Airplay chart.

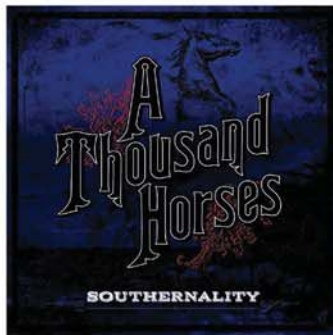
They're the first group of three or more members to do that since Zac Brown Band and "Chicken Fried" did it back in 2008, and it's easy to see why. Mixing a Southern-rock sound with heartfelt country lyrics built on true stories, the band appeals to a wide range of music lovers, even though they don't fit into any predetermined mold.

"I think music now, in every genre, is very broad when it comes to that stuff," lead singer Michael Hobby tells *Nash Country Weekly*. "You listen to country radio, or rock radio or pop radio, people now just like what they like."

"They just like something real," adds guitarist/vocalist Zach Brown.

Their country-rocking, soul-singing debut album, *Southernality*, was released June 9. But to get a true picture of who this band is, you've got to go back a lot farther.

Formed in Nashville in 2010, the band actually has roots that go way back to Michael and his best friend Bill Satcher growing up in Newberry, S.C. Bill's bass-playing cousin Graham DeLoach would come to visit from Savannah, Ga., and the trio would listen to Lynyrd Skynyrd, The Marshall Tucker Band and The Black Crowes, write songs and book gigs wherever they could find a stage.



"This guy opened up a little open-mic night at this bar called Lucy & Earl's, and gave people an opportunity to come play every week," Michael recalls. "It wasn't a huge music scene, but for a small town it was to us. Some of the funnest times we've had together are those nights and those moments."

After paying dues in dive bars and punk-rock clubs—often with just the bartenders in attendance and getting paid in beer—the three friends made their way to Nashville. There they met Zach, paid some more dues and got what they thought was their big break, a record deal with Interscope. A five-song EP was recorded, but as quickly as the deal was struck, it disappeared. Interscope dropped the band, and their management soon followed suit.

It was a heartbreaking but character-building experience, one that forced the band to take time off and reflect on what they were really about. Looking back, the four members agree getting dropped was actually the best thing for them.

"I think it taught us to trust our instincts," says Zach. "We kind of regrouped, it was just the four of us and we said, 'What do we want to do? What kind of music do we want to make?'"

"And a lot of songs came out of that frustration," adds Michael. "'Landslide' is a song that, looking back at it now four years later, clearly we were angry at somebody, and to us we were angry at 'the man,' or whatever the system was at that point. That's when it was just us four again—no manager, no agent, no label, no outside influence whatsoever—and that's when we wrote songs like 'Tennessee Whiskey,' 'Landslide' and 'Travelin' Man.'"

For four more years the band toured on their own, building a fan

Stepping Stones

Every band has to pay their dues playing in dingy clubs to tiny crowds—that's how they learn to turn heads. But for A Thousand Horses, the process seemed to stretch on forever.

"We spent a lot of years doing that," says Zach.

"One of the first shows we ever played when we formed A Thousand Horses was at a place in Birmingham, Alabama, called The Nick, and everybody and their brother has played there," recalls Michael. "That was the classic 'Go on at 1 a.m., play for two hours and get a PBR each and whatever the door deal was.'"

"We played the 40 Watt in Athens, Georgia, one time," Graham adds. "And I'm not joking you, all the rest of the bands were backstage, so the only people in the room were the two bartenders. So we were like, 'Well, let's practice.'"

But those gigs sound downright luxurious compared to how the band got its start.

"Michael and I used to play this place all the time when we were in high school called the New Brookland Tavern," Bill remembers. "The ceiling above the stage was, like, stapled garbage bags full of mildew water, because when it rained the roof would leak. We played several shows in this place when there was water leaking on the equipment. Every time the drummer would hit the snare, nasty water would go flying."

But now that they've reached the big leagues, those rough gigs are starting to seem like fond memories.

"Those are the stepping stones that get you to the next place," says Zach.



(Clockwise from above left) Bassist Graham DeLoach, frontman Michael Hobby, guitarist Bill Satcher and guitarist Zach Brown



base and getting to know each other better. (Zach joined the band only a week before the EP was recorded.) The whole time, they planned to one day return to the studio and record those new tracks, born from frustration and what seemed like failure.

But on top of the new songs, one other good thing came from the aborted deal with Interscope. The band was paired with Dave Cobb, who's now one of the most in-demand producers in country music after guiding acclaimed projects by Jamey Johnson, Jason Isbell and Chris Stapleton, among others.

"Dave was always on board since day one," says Michael. "Even after we lost our deal, he was like, 'Let's do more songs.' We were like, 'Man, we don't have any money,' but he said, 'Well, I've got a studio, so we'll figure [the money] out later.'"

Seizing the opportunity, the four

members decided to put themselves into credit-card debt to get a new project started.

"We'd scrape together whatever money we made on the road to put toward it, but I remember at one point we were all standing out in Dave's driveway and we were all on our phones trying to get approved for credit cards," Michael says with a laugh.

"Graham was like, 'I can get a \$500 limit,' Bill was like, 'I can get \$1,100,' we were like, 'Cool, maybe we can pile all that together and make a record.' We all realized real quick how bad our credit was," he adds, still laughing. "We thought it would still be like the '90s, like, 'We can get a \$50,000 credit limit, right?' And the companies were like, 'No, we'll give you \$50.'"

Financing a record with a Discover card might sound like a terrible idea, but the band did actually have a plan.

"We were totally like, 'OK, here's the



Heartbreak on Tour

One of the standout tracks on *Southernity*, “Tennessee Whiskey” takes “based on a true story” to another level. According to the band, every detail of the breakup anthem actually happened—right down to the names of the cities—and they were all there to witness the heartbreak.

“We broke up right between Scottsdale, Arizona, and El Paso, Texas,” Michael says about the girl in “Tennessee Whiskey.” “We were on tour and I couldn’t talk because it was all of us in a van, and I was like, ‘I can’t have this conversation right now.’”

“We got to El Paso, I made the phone call, and that was it,” he says, shrugging. “And right after that we went to Austin, Texas, played a show, and then continued the tour. So ‘Tennessee Whiskey’ is a real, true story—like word for word. And these guys lived that with me because it was just us out on the road, so I leaned on them. There’s no bullsh*t about that one.”

breakdown. If we can sell 2,000 of these [records] over the course of a year, we can pay this back,” says Graham.

But before that could happen, fate would intervene in the form of Jimmy Harnen, president of Republic Nashville.

“The minute we finished it, before we could even press it or sell it, our new management played it for Jimmy on a golf course and he was like, ‘I’m in, I want to sign them,’” Michael says.

That self-financed project’s 11 tracks would become the basis for *Southernity*—the title a combination of the words “Southern” and “personality”—with a few new songs sprinkled in. They went back into the studio with Dave Cobb and rerecorded the whole thing, this time with a real budget. “Smoke,” the breakout single co-written by Michael with Ross Copperman and Jon Nite, was the first thing they laid down.

“I wrote it two days before we went in to start *Southernity*,” Michael

says. “And I remember when I wrote it I was like, ‘Damn, I can’t wait to send this to the guys.’ We learned it the next day, and the day after that we started making the album. It kind of set the tone for the entire project.”

Full of smoldering vocals and crunchy guitars, the song’s lyrics compare a wild new love to the addictive, gotta-have-it nature of a cigarette.

She’s smoke / I pull her in nice and slow / She’s a habit and I can’t let go / Blowing rings around my heart.

Making its radio debut in January, the song hit the top of *Billboard*’s Country Airplay chart just six months later.

Their next single, “(This Ain’t No) Drunk Dial,” hits radio waves on June 29, and tells the familiar tale of making a desperate late-night call hoping to rekindle an old flame, all set to pound-ing drums and Southern-rock guitars.

“It’s just that classic story of laying it all out on the line and saying let’s forget

about what happened and just move forward and be together,” says Michael about the track, co-written with Corey Crowder, Neil Mason and Cale Dodds.

“The perspective was not that you were making a drunk dial, but more that you’re just confessing your love to the other person,” he continues. “You’re not hammered when you make the call—but maybe you’ve had a few beers.”

“It sounds like the guy has made some drunk dials in the past,” says Graham with a chuckle.

Heading out this summer on their first big bill, as part of Darius Rucker’s Southern Style Tour, the band also notched their first performance on an awards show at this year’s CMT Music Awards, just one more humbling achievement for a group of buddies who can’t believe their country music dreams are coming true.

Graham admits, “We’re still just trying to sell 2,000 copies.” ■



Fairy Tale Fun

FROM A NEW SINGLE TO HER OWN REALITY SHOW, KELLIE PICKLER'S LIFE IS A DREAM COME TRUE.

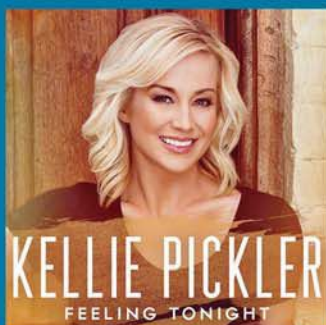
STORY BY TAMMY RAGUSA

KELLIE PICKLER IS BUBBLING OVER as she kicks off mile-high blue stilettos and curls her legs under her as she nests into a stately armchair in her manager's office on Music Row. She heaves an effervescent sigh—a combination of relief and excitement. Kellie has a whole lot to be excited about, not the least of which is the return of her husband, producer Kyle Jacobs, just a few days away. “I can’t sleep in that big bed by myself,” she says. “It’ll be 10 days on Tuesday that we’ve been apart. He’s been in Florida with Lee Brice writing, then he goes to Reno for some shows. Then I leave Monday and he gets back Tuesday morning and I get back Tuesday night.” Kellie’s dazzling smile grows as she considers their reunion.



Kellie and her songwriter/producer husband, Kyle Jacobs, will give TV cameras plenty of action and plenty of romance in their new reality series, *I Love Kellie Pickler*.

CAN YOU FEEL IT?



For Kellie's new single, "Feeling Tonight," she and Kyle tapped Nashville's prolific songwriting community. "Sarah Buxton wrote my new single with Jimmy Robbins and Josh Osborne, and they're amazing," she gushes. "For anyone who has ever met Sarah, they know. She is just this little spitfire, ball of energy. She's so talented, such an amazing songwriter, obviously, and an amazing singer. She's a great girl. She's a girl's girl." She also co-wrote and recorded "Stupid Boy," which Keith Urban covered, and contributed those bluesy background vocals on David Nail's "Let It Rain."

But "Feeling Tonight" isn't bluesy. It's straight-up toe-tapping, singalong sunshine, perfect for summer. "It was really fun to take this song into the studio and make it come to life," Kellie remembers. "I really wanted to capture that same energy that Sarah had on the demo, and she actually came in and sang the harmony on it."

KELLIE PICKLER CONTINUED

Does absence make the heart grow fonder? "It works for us," she says, laughing. "Just spending time apart we have time to miss each other. We have time to appreciate the things we love about each other. If we have to go two weeks without seeing each other, when we do see each other, you can't keep us away from one another." She giggles like a teenager in love, but that relationship, that undeniable chemistry between Kellie and Kyle, is the reason that Ryan Seacrest Productions will be doing a show on the high-profile music industry couple. Tentatively titled *I Love Kellie Pickler* and set to debut this fall on CMT, the program will focus more on their personal lives than their professional lives. "It's definitely

going to capture the work life to a degree," she explains, "but it's been almost 10 years since I did *Idol*, so people know that I sing and live on a bus and tour. We'll capture the work part, but we'll also capture the behind-the-curtain."

Some couples may be unnerved at the thought of cameras following their every move, but for Kellie, it's been a way of life since she was 19. "I was first introduced to the world on reality television," she says. "It was *American Idol*, and people were shown a part of my story, not my whole story, but a small part. I've been pretty much an open book, and having those cameras around has been kind of a normal lifestyle for me since I was a teenager. Even doing *Dancing With the Stars*, they're there all the

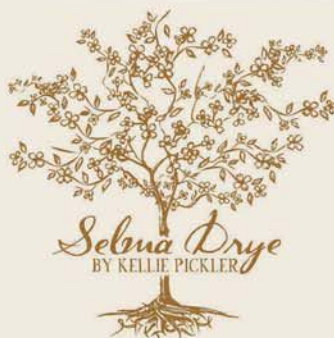


From her days on *American Idol* (above) to *Dancing With the Stars* (right), Kellie is no stranger to reality television; (below) Kellie as a high school cheerleader with her grandmother Faye.



Family Furnishings

Kellie has never been afraid of bringing her friends and family into her passions. Or building a new passion around her loved ones, as she's done with her first line of home goods, Selma Drye by Kellie Pickler. "My grandparents on my father's side, the Picklers, had a big part in raising me, and my grandmother, Faye Pickler, her mother, Selma, lived in this little trailer in front of ours in Albemarle, North Carolina," Kellie explains. "So this line was inspired by her and the women of her generation, they're things they would love. They're items with multiple uses. We found this amazing retired pastor in Iowa who is a woodworker now and he makes all of the wood pieces in the collection, whether it's picture frames or cutting boards or whatever." The collection wasn't only inspired by the Picklers, though. Husband Kyle and his father have a role in it, too. Kellie nods and tells us, "It's amazing to be able to take things that I think my great-grandmother and my grandmother Faye would have loved and things that my husband, who enjoys woodworking, or my father-in-law, who turns wood, have made and marry it all together. I took all those pieces and partnered with the Grand Ole Opry for the Selma Drye collection."



time and it becomes a lifestyle. You get used to it. It's like *The Truman Show*." Kellie laughs at the analogy, then adds, "I don't have anything to hide. There are those moments you need to keep private for yourself, but you have to have that little part of your life that remains sacred to you and your significant other. All in all, we're blessed to have this opportunity and we're looking forward to whatever doors this opens. We want to be a part of people's lives and make them smile and bring them joy and make them laugh. These are short 30-minute episodes, so during those 30 minutes, we just want to make people laugh, make 'em smile."

It seems inevitable that some of Kellie and Kyle's professional lives will be incorporated into the show,



Earlier this year, Kyle and Kellie savored their time together in the Bahamas.

especially since he is producing her new album with their friend Matt McClure. In fact, it's the first time for the couple to collaborate in the studio, although they have been writing together since they started dating. "I met Kyle right before I

started writing the second album, which Chris Lindsey produced," she explains. "Chris and his wife, Aimee Mayo, and Karyn Rochelle were the first songwriters I ever met before I even moved to Nashville. And they really helped me discover the songwriter in myself. I met my husband through Chris and Aimee. They introduced us and we went on a date and started writing the next day."

So, how does the couple that is used to spending days or even weeks apart adjust to all of the newfound—and televised—togetherness? "We're excited about doing the show. It will enable us to spend more time together than we ever have. Ever. Since we've known each other."

Here's to happy ever after. **NCW**



photo by David McClister/Sweet Talk Publicity

Getting REAL

“Real Life” singer **Jake Owen** dishes out some real-life advice.

BY JIM CASEY

The last few years have been good for 31-year-old Jake Owen. Besides solidifying his place as one of country music’s golden boys, Jake got married, had a baby girl and his dad beat cancer. You could say things have gotten real for the beach-loving native Floridian . . . and you can hear it in his music. While singles like “Days of Gold” and “Beachin’” from his last album conjure up the familiar sounds of summer fun that Jake is known for, those songs shared album space with the stripped-down, heartfelt “What We Ain’t Got.” The point is, there’s a duality to Jake’s music and he’s hoping his new single, “Real Life,” from his upcoming fifth studio album, helps showcase his dichotomy and evolution as an artist.

“I think what I wanted to accomplish the most with ‘Real Life’ was to build upon what I’ve already built,” says Jake. “I’ve noticed the difference between a song on the radio and a career song, and the songs that have been career songs for me had a polarizing factor to them. ‘Beachin’ and ‘Barefoot Blue Jean Night’ didn’t sound like anything else. Even ‘What We Ain’t Got,’ although it didn’t go high up the chart, it was a polarizing song and a career song for me. That’s what ‘Real Life’ is for me. There are so many facets to it and sonic qualities that lead you to think it’s a multigenre-sounding song. But it has something that makes people remember it. And the lyrics are so true to life that I think they can relate to anyone anywhere, without going back to the beach again with a song, which I’m sure a lot of people were expecting for a summer tune. ‘Real Life’ is something that can be played on the beach or played on the summer party list without being over the top. It was very well written and said a lot of things in my life that I wanted to say.”



REAL SLY

While Jake is holding his cards close to his vest regarding the title and release date of his upcoming fifth studio album, he does reveal a couple of choice tidbits about the new record, which Ross Copperman and Shane McAnally are co-producing.

"The album has a lot of stuff that feels like real life," says Jake. "It's got that fun, young, nostalgic, singalong-style feel, but you can also expect some songs to catch you off guard, and I think that's what a record should do—songs that can make you feel something good and songs that can bring you back to life. We're thinking Septemberish [for the release date], end of late summer or fall."



Speaking of things Jake wants to say, we hit up the singing sage for some "Real Life" advice to a dozen questions that our *Nash Country Weekly* staffers needed answers to.

What's the secret to raising a happy baby girl?

Showing love all the time. I constantly shower her with love. Little girls make the world go around.

What's the key to writing a good song?

Being honest.

What's one simple step that will improve your golf game?

Slow down your swing.

What's the secret to making a good sandwich?

You've got to get your ratio of meat to cheese right.



If you're introducing someone to country music for the first time, whose record do you give 'em?

George Strait. To me, he's what country music is all about.

If you're growing your hair out, how to do get through the ugly-hair stage?

You can't. You just roll with it.

How do you avoid boredom on the tour bus?

Take a lot of photos.

If you can only get to the gym one day a week, which muscle group do you work out?

Curls for the girls, man.

What's the best way to beat the summer heat?

Jump in the water. Any body of water will do.

What's the optimal speed to drive on the interstate without getting a ticket?

Seventy-five mph.

What's one topic you never bring up at a dinner party?

Politics.

Is it better to ask for permission or forgiveness?

Permission. **NCW**

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Miss Free Spirit 2015

Kacey Musgraves
celebrates family, home
and doing her own thing
on her joyous new album.

BY
JON
FREEMAN



BACK IN 2013, KACEY MUSGRAVES

may have ruffled a few feathers with her single “Follow Your Arrow,” a witty number from her Grammy-winning album *Same Trailer Different Park* that champions a laissez-faire attitude toward smoking pot and same-sex relationships.

Critics ate it up. The song went on to win CMA Song of the Year in 2014, bolstered by the praise of fans and industry insiders alike. In spite of the accolades, it never made it inside the Top 40 of *Billboard*’s Country Airplay chart, its mature themes a touch too risqué to earn across-the-board radio support. For her part, Kacey doesn’t see that as a failure.

“It’s done more for my career than any song ever has, so I really think the measures of success are different there,” Kacey says, calling in from a busy week on the road as she prepares to release her sophomore major-label album, *Pageant Material*. “It’s allowed me to do some insane, wonderful things and reach a lot of people that I wouldn’t have otherwise.”

Those things, like joining up with pop star Katy Perry’s Prismatic World Tour or becoming the first country artist to perform at the GLAAD Media Awards, introduced Kacey to a whole new set of fans who might otherwise have never heard her if she had been reliant solely on country radio as her delivery mechanism. “Follow Your Arrow” became a

KACEY MUSGRAVES CONT.

sort of rallying cry, its overarching message of celebrating individual freedom resonating with anyone who has known the unwelcome intrusion of work, the government or even nosy-ass neighbors.

“So it’s really interesting to me. I don’t really know what that means,” she adds, pondering the fact that much of her respectable success—*Same Trailer* is now certified gold—has come from places other than radio. “I do think that country music has always been about real life and real things that happen to people and things that people are going through.”

On *Pageant Material*, she doubles down on that idea of individualism and singing about life as she sees it. While Kacey’s views on marijuana legalization and marriage equality may be in line with many of her fellow 26-year-olds’, at her core she’s still a small-town Texas girl with the bootstrapping mentality one needs to survive the music industry.

Take the album’s lead single, “Biscuits,” for example: picking up where “Arrow” left off, the largely acoustic number doles out good-humored advice to *hoe your own row* and *mend your own fences* rather than trying to solve everyone else’s problems.

“I like growing things organically and making your way and being a self-made person and I’m for any human doing that,” she explains. “I feel like a lot of people could get behind that message.”

Simply, songs like “Biscuits” and “Follow Your Arrow” are about telling Kacey’s own truth rather than promoting any political agenda. They’re about owning the things that make you the unique person you are, even if—as she notes in *Pageant Material*’s “Cup of Tea”—they may not taste right to someone else.

That message is a recurring one on *Pageant Material*, which reunites Kacey with *Same Trailer* co-producers Luke Laird and Shane McAnally. In the cheeky title track, Kacey proudly trumpets the fact that she can’t just smile and look pretty if she’s not in the mood. *I’d rather lose for what I am than win for what I ain’t*, she sings, as steel and strings sway behind her. (For the re-

(From left)
Shane McAnally,
Luke Laird and
Kacey hard at
work in the
studio

Chosen Family

PAGEANT MATERIAL puts Kacey back in the co-producer seat with accomplished songwriters Luke Laird and Shane McAnally, but it also partners her with the songwriting talents that made her major-label debut, *Same Trailer Different Park*, stand out from the crowd.

In addition to top-shelf talents Luke and Shane, Kacey collaborated on several songs with Brandy Clark and Josh Osborne, rounding out a self-contained group whose names can often be found together on album credits. Additionally, Natalie Hemby and Ashley Arrison made contributions.

“I think everyone’s off doing their own thing and kicking ass at that, but I was really excited when they wanted to get together again and write for this project,” Kacey

says. “I just didn’t want to fix what wasn’t broken, in the sense of I’m happy with what I create with them. There’s never been any ego involved. It’s just simply what’s best for the song, and they’re all unique and creative in their own ways. They all have a different songwriting voice, they bring something different to the table, but we all blend well together.”

“We also laugh our asses off when we’re together and we have a really good time doing it,” she adds.

A majority of the songs are from a writing retreat in West Texas, but the final track, “Fine,” stretches back to her first encounter with producer Shane.

“Our friend Ashley Arrison, she was like, ‘You gotta come over and meet this guy Shane, you’re gonna love him,’” she recalls. “And we hit it off. That night we wrote two songs, and ‘Fine’ was one of them. It’s always been one I really loved and never did anything with. We dusted it off and tried it out and I ended up loving it. I thought it really made a good fit here because it has a classic sound.”

cord, Kacey competed in only one pageant: Little Miss Tater Tot during her hometown’s Golden Sweet Potato Festival, when she was 3. She didn’t win, but it seems to have worked out for the best.)

As radio successes go, Kacey fared much better with *Same Trailer*’s first single, “Merry Go ’Round,” reaching the Top 10 with her honest look at the kind of desperation that permeates small-town life. Publications like the UK’s *Independent* construed it as disparaging of small towns, though Kacey has frequently spoken to the contrary. *Pageant Material* makes a solid assertion

Shane, Luke & Kacey in the studio and B&W of Kacey in studio courtesy Sandbox Entertainment; Luke, Kacey & Shane at Grammys by Cliff Lipsen/CBS



With producers Luke and Shane (top) and songwriter friends like Brandy Clark (above right), Kacey copped two Grammys; (left) the “Dime Store Cowgirl” at 12.



that Kacey is indeed proud of who she is and warmly explores her upbringing in tiny Golden, Texas.

“All I have to go on is my past experience and the experiences of those around me,” she says, describing her songwriting process. “I don’t know where that came from, that I was ever against small towns. Anyone who knows me knows that I’m very proud of where I come from. I don’t think being truthful about life should equal negativity, it’s just observing.”

A vivid childhood memory inspired Kacey to write “Dime Store Cowgirl,” which declares her fondness for

her hometown and promises that nothing—not even getting her picture made with Willie Nelson—could change that. The title phrase was given to her as a 12-year-old when she was a precocious entertainer being ferried around to festivals by her parents.

“This other stage mom came over to me and was making fun of the way I was wearing my hat, my cowboy hat,” she recalls. “She said, ‘You shouldn’t wear your hat like that. You just look like some dime store cowgirl.’ I was like, ‘A: What does that even mean? I’m 12. And thanks? I’m saving that one for later.’ And I did.”



GLAM SQUAD

It takes teamwork to assemble the songs for an album like *Pageant Material*, but Kacey keeps her circle of co-writers tight. Here are the talents who helped her polish this collection o

1 High Time



2 Dime Store Cowgirl



3 Late to the Party



4 Pageant Material



5 This Town



6 Biscuits



7 Somebody to Love



8 Miserable



9 Die Fun



10 Family Is Family



11 Good Ol' Boys Club



12 Cup of Tea



13 Fine



- Kacey Musgraves ● Luke Laird
- Shane McAnally ● Brandy Clark
- Josh Osborne ● Natalie Hemby
- Ashley Arrison

KACEY MUSGRAVES CONT.

Beyond the memories of growing up in Golden, family plays an integral role for Kacey on *Pageant Material*. There's a song, "Family Is Family," that says you're stuck with your kin, for better or worse. For Kacey, it's likely better: her sister Kelly Christine Sutton took the album's photographs and guides Kacey's distinct, whimsical visual aesthetic.

"I could probably [have worked] with a lot of different people that I didn't have the opportunity to last time, but I just thought there was something cool with keeping it in the family," Kacey says. "She's actu-

long as I can remember," Kacey explains. "She always just had the craziest stories to tell about her work, and anytime I got to be around her we'd always get her going on these stories.

"It's cool that she's literally embedded in what will be the musical thumbprint I'll leave behind," she adds.

The expression of Kacey's individuality is as evident in the sound of *Pageant Material* as its lyrics. There are no detuned guitar riffs, thunderous drums or record scratches; aside from the instantly memorable melodies, there are very few

"I do think that the more country that my music gets, the less it somehow fits into today's country music box, and that's fine."

ally way cooler than me, so I like having her ideas around because she just has a unique opinion and she's very truthful."

Furthermore, Kacey's maternal grandmother (known as "Memaw") appears at the start of "This Town," a song about the way small towns can get ugly if people aren't nice. Kacey captured the audio snippet with her phone during a visit back home, listening to her grandmother talk about an unruly hospital patient.

"She passed away a little over a year ago and she was a special woman. She was an ER nurse, always, as

sonic touches that identify this as a major-label country release in 2015. Instead, Kacey's stripped-down and strum-friendly tunes are tastefully adorned with woozy steel playing, shades of trebly electric guitar and orchestral strings that recall Glen Campbell's country-pop heyday.

The question remains about the commercial impact that will surround *Pageant Material* around its release and the role that radio will end up playing. As of this writing, "Biscuits" is no longer on the *Billboard* Country Airplay chart, but Kacey isn't too worried about its performance. She

Kacey winds up the crowd at the Stagecoach festival in Indio, Calif.



does her best work unencumbered by those expectations.

"I feel strongly about who I am and who I'm not and I'm comfortable with it," she says. "I've never created based on anyone's opinion or any kind of format. Selfishly, all the music makes me feel really good to create. It makes me feel like I'm using my brain. Everything else is subject to that."

However radio handles it, *Pageant Material* is still an engaging listen: sharp observations and stories buoyed by easygoing melodies, easily digestible in one sitting. It's plenty thought-provoking, but not so self-

serious that it doesn't know how to crack a joke or throw a little shade.

"That's what I love about country music and that's what I want it to always be," Kacey says. "That's always the kind of music that I'm going to make is just inspired by real life, not like a basket of four or five subject matters. I do feel really fortunate with the support that I've gotten. I do think that the more country that my music gets, the less it somehow fits into today's country music box, and that's fine."

That may be true in some regard, as radio leans more toward a harder-

edged party sound. Regardless, it's clear that Kacey's work thus far has been crucial in preserving the wit and soul that has long made country music so great. And to think, all she had to do was be herself.

"I do feel like country music in itself has been really supportive of me and I'm really thankful for that," she says. "I feel like I have the best fans in the world. They're very diverse and unique. I have a lot of people that love country music as my fans and a lot of people that don't love country music as my fans, and I honestly wouldn't have it any other way." **NCW**



SKULL SESSION

*Photos
by Tyler
Andrews*

EASTON CORBIN looks to the past and the future with his new album, *About to Get Real*.

STORY BY
BOB DOERSCHUK

FOR YEARS, THE DOORS that once opened into Skull's Rainbow Room have been locked. Once upon a time, this was *the* happening place in Printers Alley, Nashville's once-upon-a-time entertainment district. Live blues, jazz and country music blared from clubs up and down this one-block strip, most of them less than reputable, many of them hosting young hopefuls like Waylon Jennings and Dottie West—and none were as vital as Skull's Rainbow Room.

The Alley's golden age ended in 1998 when owner David "Skull" Schulman was murdered by two burglars who broke into the premises after hours. The place was subsequently padlocked, used for storage and eventually left alone with its memories, good and ill.

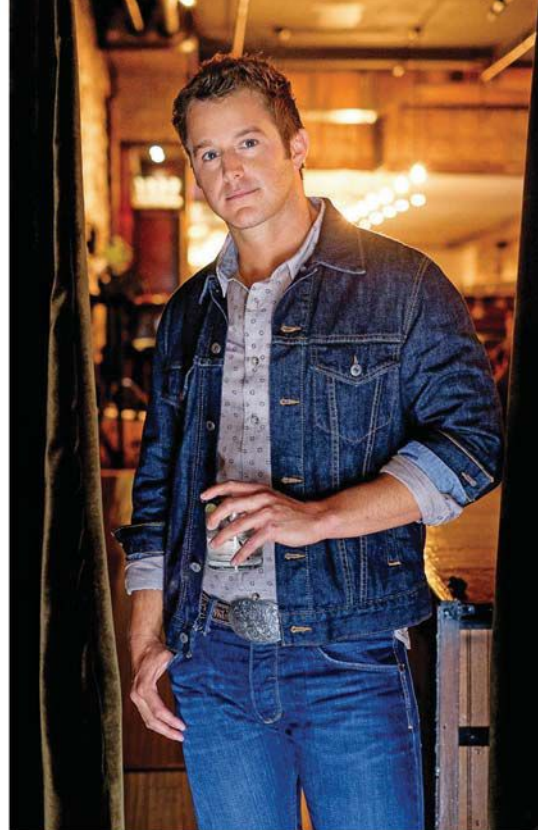
All of that changed in June 2015, when the locks were removed and the doors were opened to a new generation of music lovers. Several days before that event, one country music

star was granted a preview tour, a free drink and a seat at the new bar, built with wood from the venue's former front door.

"This is a really great vibe," says Easton Corbin, taking in the artfully mismatched décor—the small stage where Elvis, Johnny Cash and Bob Dylan made unannounced appearances, old mail chutes reconfigured as pillars behind the bar, low-hanging Edison bulbs, century-old tin tiles on one wall and



(Above) There is no shortage of spirits available at the refurbished bar; (right) Easton proving that denim never goes out of style; (below) Easton chats with *Nash Country Weekly* about his new album.



brass doors built more than 120 years ago. “I love the colors of the wood. And it’s so historic. It’s cool to bring history back. You don’t see that much anymore.”

Then he notices a vintage menu mounted near the stage, which had been salvaged from inside one of the oak walls. “And I like that,” he adds, pointing to the list of entrees. “A 40-cent steak sandwich. I’m in!”

History is important to Easton. On his upcoming album, *About to Get Real*, which drops on June 30, the handsome young artist draws its mixture of contemporary and traditional country from the same

well that nurtured his self-titled 2010 Mercury Records Nashville debut. Powered by two chart-topping singles, “A Little More Country Than That” and “Roll With It,” it opened the door to his follow-up, *All Over the Road*, which peaked at No. 2 in 2013.

“All artists want to grow and evolve,” he muses. “What’s important to me is that, within that growth, I stay relevant and modern but also keep to who I am in music. And that’s the country element. I always keep that in between the lines.”

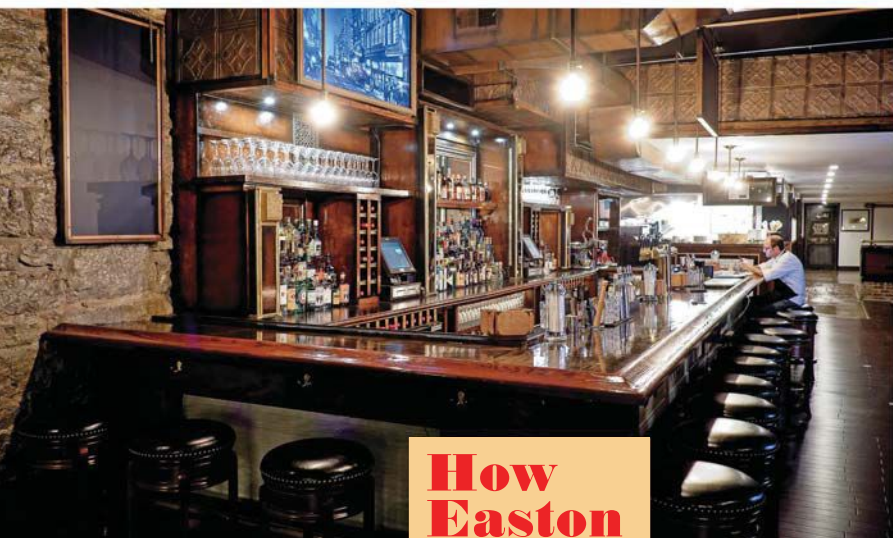
The first step is to find songs that can absorb both sides of Easton’s

game plan. “It’s about finding songs that you love and that you believe in and that are real to me—songs that I can relate to,” he explains. “Your fans and the community out there will know if you’re being true to yourself and honest and being who you are. So I might find a great song, but if it’s not a fit for me, I’m not going to do it.”

Working with producer Carson Chamberlain, Easton checked out a good number of demos before approving a dozen tracks for *About to Get Real*. “Sometimes you hear one that just blows you away,” he says. “Other times you listen to something and it’s like, ‘Let me hear it a



(Above) A trio of trendy jackets that David “Skull” Schulman used to wear adorn the walls; (below left) the renovated Rainbow Room features exposed brick, wood and a long bar, as well as an open kitchen; (below right) a bust of Skull Schulman sits atop a beautiful piano.



How Easton Stays “Real”

- 1 Fishing.
- 2 Hunting.
- 3 Riding motorcycles.
- 4 Visiting family.
- 5 Having some downtime at home.

few more times.’ Those kinds of songs are the ones that grow on you.”

It took only seconds for Easton and Carson to green-light the song that is the album’s current single, “Baby Be My Love Song,” written by Jim Collins and Brett James. “When I first heard that song, it just felt great,” Easton recalls. “I kept listening to it and it was like, ‘Man, I’m not getting tired of this song! I want to hear it over and over again. It gets better every time

I hear it.’ I figure that if it made me feel like that, I hope my fans feel the same way.”

On the other hand, “Yup,” a sly, slow-sauntering and seductive tale of saloon romance, took a while longer. “I’d actually known of that song for two years before we started work on *About to Get Real*,” Easton says. “First time I heard it, I was like, ‘Yeah, that’s OK.’ But then

I kept listening to it over time and I was like, ‘Man, that’s pretty catchy. I think I’ll need to cut this thing!’”

Shane Minor, Phil O’Donnell and Wade Kirby were the writers for “Yup.” Easton is also credited on several tracks. “Damn Girl,” which he penned with Carson and Jeff Hyde, captures his humor and knack for coming up with clever double meanings.

“Jeff brought in the idea of [the words] ‘damn girl.’ We talked about it and it just came pretty quickly after that. It’s funny, because you think ‘damn girl’ is like some guy being kind of mad, but it can also be a gentlemanly thing. I don’t mean to use this kind of language writing about a lady,” Easton says, his own gentlemanly character

Easton Unplugged

What is your go-to drink?

"It changes over time. Sometimes it's Crown [Royal]. During the winter, it's whiskey time. Lately it's been vodka and water—it's a better summer drink. And, yes, I carry it on my bus, but don't tell my grandma."

What are your favorite Nashville hangouts?

"We travel so much that when I get a chance to hang out at home, I'll take that any day. But if I'm going out to a bar, I like Losers Bar and Grill."

What's your hangover cure?

"Coconut water."

What's on your playlist?

"Especially before shows, I like Haggard's *Back to the Barrooms*. *Whiskey Bent and Hell Bound* is one of my favorite Hank Jr. records. And anything by George Jones."

quickly popping up, then he grins and adds, "but she's just so stunning and she blows him away so much, he's like . . . 'Damn, girl!'"

"Like a Song," which Easton and Carson wrote with Stephen Allen Davis, is perhaps a more personal statement—and a true reflection of his love for both today's country and those great performers of years past. "I told Carson, 'Man, it would be cool to write something with a George Jones feel,'" he says. "We started writing and it came out sounding so classic, with those chords and everything. As soon as we finished, I said, 'I'm gonna cut that song.'"

This was significant because not

every Easton Corbin song is guaranteed a spot on an Easton Corbin album. "I wrote a song called 'There She Goes' that didn't make it," he notes. "In fact, I took a couple of things off there that we'd already cut because some of the newer stuff that we had completed just felt like it fit the album better."

The idea of getting—or staying—real is a priority for Easton. He has been in Nashville long enough to be reminded each day of how far he's come. Just by driving around town, he passes by landmarks of each step forward he's taken toward his platinum-selling status and headlining summer tour.

One such landmark is the Ace Hardware store in the Donelson neighborhood of Nashville, where he worked shortly after arriving from Florida in 2006. "I still go by there when I'm in the area," he says. "There's not a lot of people working there now who were there when I was, but there are still a few familiar faces."

Touching base with the past is an essential exercise for Easton, musical and personal. "It's a great thing to be able to look back," he reflects. "That's part of who you are and how you got here. All those places in your past are part of what makes you who you are." **NCW**



Parallel Lives

NASHVILLE CO-STAR CHRIS CARMACK FINDS THAT ART AND REAL LIFE ARE STRANGELY INTERSECTING.

Chris Carmack is practically convinced that he might be living in a parallel universe. Strange and uncanny circumstances are happening, where his television persona of country singer Will Lexington on the hit series *Nashville* and his real-life self are starting to mirror each other.

Chris reveals some of those eerie coincidences during a recent conversation at his Nashville publicist's office. What immediately strikes you about the affable singer/actor is the energetic manner in which he greets you, particularly since he's just getting over a nasty bout of bronchitis. "I'm just about over it," he says, smiling. Chris has just come off the nine-city *Nashville Live in Concert Tour*, for which the musically talented members of the cast played large markets such as Chicago and Los Angeles. During the stops, Chris was able to get an audience read on the songs from his upcoming EP, *Pieces of You*. The first single, "Being Alone," has just been released.

"I performed all the songs from the EP, and got great audience reaction," Chris happily recalls. He adds that the EP is "still under construction," but looks to wrap sometime soon. "We are hammering away at it," he says. "You just want to get certain things right."

"Being Alone," which Chris wrote himself, reflects on his early days as a fledgling performer in Los Angeles. He moved there from his Washington, D.C., home, knowing nary a soul and having zero connections to anyone in the entertainment biz, a scary scenario for sure. "I moved out there pretty much on my own," Chris begins after a brief moment to collect his thoughts. The experience is very much on his mind, and it's obvious that those times were often painful, as his clearly audible sigh might suggest.

"That is a song drawn from my experience of moving to Los Angeles to become an actor," Chris explains. "It's about getting a little bit of a taste of what pursuing this dream is going to require of you." A subtext of the song certainly centers on the search for one's identity and finding a place among a world of strangers. And here's where the Will Lexington/Chris Carmack duality comes into play.

The millions of fans who viewed the third season finale in

May—and Nashville has been renewed by ABC for a fourth season—are aware that Chris' character, Will, has revealed that he is gay. "He has been struggling to find his own identity," Chris says. "Now he's embarking on this new part of his life."

Chris can state the same. Powered by the success of the TV series, Chris has felt confident enough in his musical ability to make his home permanently in Nashville and begin a new phase of his career. "This show has really changed the trajectory of my life in so many ways," he says, letting go a wide grin. "I have moved to Nashville and that's a huge change in my life that the show has afforded me. It's also

bringing music to the forefront," adds Chris, who plays jazz saxophone and guitar and writes his own songs. "I'm in a city of people who do [music] for a living. I feel like I've really come home."

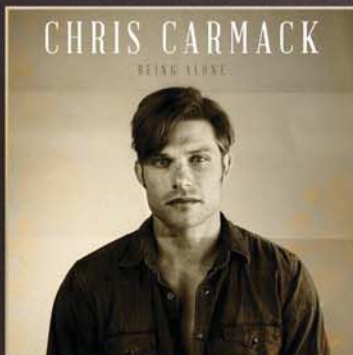
Beyond the resolving of an identity crisis, other parallels between Chris and Will have played out in somewhat dramatic fashion. "The show closely mirrors what happens in actual life," Chris notes. "On the show, Will performed his first show in a honky-tonk. Around the same time, I performed my first solo show in a Nashville bar. And then the same week that Will played a stadium show, I performed on my first stadium show ever." To top that off, Chris points out that a number of his *Nashville* castmates have enjoyed similar experiences.

So while he enjoys a brief hiatus from shooting *Nashville*, Chris is putting the finishing touches on the *Pieces of You* EP. "I wrote all of the songs on there, and most of them have to do with personal experiences in Los Angeles," Chris says. "They are all true stories. My songs are usually about trying to

connect with people, and that's pretty true here. The one exception is 'Always Mine,' which I wrote for a buddy for his wedding, and yet it's true to what I witnessed in their relationship."

Like the die-hard fans of *Nashville*, Chris eagerly awaits the evolution of his character—and no, he hasn't been told what lies next. "I'm really excited to see what the writers are going to come up with," he says, grinning. "I don't know what's going to happen—but I know they're going to come up with something great."

BOB PAXMAN



"This show has really changed the trajectory of my life in so many ways."

ON THE TV SERIES
NASHVILLE



LOOKS GOOD SOUNDS GOOD

There's a reason why Dallas Davidson is one of Nashville's most successful songwriters. He has an uncanny ear for hooks and melodies, and that instinct has helped him rack up nearly 20 chart-topping hits in his career.

The very first time Dallas wrote with his two buddies Rhett Akins and Ashley Gorley, he was honed in on that instinct. "I think we started seven songs that day," says Rhett with a laugh, remembering the trio's first writing session. "We'd get a verse written and almost get to the chorus, and Dallas would go, 'Nope. This ain't it. Not a hit.' Me and Ashley would go, 'We thought it was pretty good,' but Dallas would say, 'That ain't the one.'"

"Nothing felt great," says Ashley. "Me and Dallas are the same like that, though. I feel like sometimes it takes more time to find something worth writing than it takes to write the actual song. It was the first time Dallas, Rhett and I had written together, so I always feel a little more pressure of, 'Hey, we should do something really great for the first time.'"

They continued to plug away at different songs and different ideas, but nothing seemed to spark Dallas' interest enough to complete anything. "Finally about four in the afternoon, I was figuring we were all going to pack up and leave," says Rhett.

But Ashley had hopes that the day wouldn't be completely wasted.

He remembered having a title saved for a song called "Tonight Looks Good on You." While sitting at the piano in Dallas' office on Music Row, Ashley began to find an inspiring melody when the words *you ain't got a dress that I don't like* just fell out of his mouth. "I think Dallas

was like, 'Well, where's that been all day?'" says Ashley, laughing.

"Tonight Looks Good on You" began to take shape before their eyes. "We were just writing the idea the way we felt it needed to be written," says Ashley. "We wanted the music to have a little bit of a sexy groove, and we wanted the music to sound like the idea. Once we knew we were on to something, the rest just fell out of the sky."

Following their writing session, Ashley created a demo of the song. Two weeks later, Jason Aldean put the song on hold for his upcoming album, *Old Boots, New Dirt*. Jason released the tune as the follow-up single to his back-to-back No. 1 hits, "Burnin' It Down" and "Just Gettin' Started," which was also written by Rhett and Ashley, along with Chris DeStefano.

"I have good luck with first-time writes," reflects Rhett. "It's funny that we all have written together, but never in that three-way setup until this song. We really had a good thing going, and I think it's safe to say that this song is definitely the product of not settling."

ALANNA CONAWAY

"TONIGHT LOOKS GOOD ON YOU"

JASON ALDEAN

WRITERS: Dallas Davidson, Ashley Gorley, Rhett Akins

PLAY IT AGAIN

DALLAS DAVIDSON

has made a name

for himself in country music as a hit songwriter, but lately he has been dabbling in other aspects of the music business. Some of the new roles he's taken on include producing and opening a brand-new publishing company, Play It Again Music Publishing, named after his No. 1 hit for Luke Bryan.





Jason by John Russell/CMA; Photo by Sarah Pearson/SONY/ATV; Dallas courtesy Dallas Davidson; Ashley courtesy Ashley Gentry

GRANGER SMITH

ORIGIN
Dallas



AGE
35

PRIME PICKS
"TONIGHT"
"SILVERADO
BENCH SEAT"
"OXYGEN"

BIGGEST HIT
"BACKROAD
SONG"

YOU MIGHT KNOW GRANGER SMITH

from his pure, clear vocals and honest, authentic songs. Or you might know him as Earl Dibbles Jr., his over-the-top country boy alter ego.

The creation of Earl was calculated, but the success of the fictitious overall-wearing character exceeded Granger's expectations. "Earl just kind of fell into place for us, in all honesty," he explains. "Our goal was

to make videos over the course of several years, and the goal was to get a video to go viral as a tool to gain a broader audience. We shot it out where my parents live and, literally, planned his monologue based on conversations I had with a couple of family members. I think we all kind of have a little Earl in our family somewhere. But that's all it really was. We shot the video, and

when it went viral, we just started chasing it and thinking, 'What else is in store for Earl?' And that brought us a bigger audience, which was exactly the plan. Then, when we started embracing the fact that we had this popular alter ego, it became an advertising tool for us. And social media became a way to advertise back towards Granger music and Granger merchandise. It's been

Granger photos courtesy NPG PR; perf by Kevin Pyle/ZUMA Wire/Corbis

"Wake up, put a good dip in and crack a cold one"—words to live by from Granger's overall-wearing, all-American country boy alter ego, Earl Dibbles Jr.



unbelievable how that has connected with other people."

Indeed it has. A peek at their respective Twitter accounts shows that Granger has a little less than 200,000 followers, while Earl has almost twice that. But instead of being fearful that the comedic antics of Earl might overshadow his artistry, Granger embraced it. "In complete honesty, every morning I wake up

and I'm thankful for what we built with Earl and I'm thankful for how that has taken off, because that's what we intended to do," he says. "We didn't make a video because we had a bunch of free time or because we wanted to explore new options on how to use a camera. We made Earl so it could get as big as it possibly could, and it did. It has helped me so much to get music to a broader audi-

ence, to get fans to hear the Granger music. And when Earl became popular, all my old stuff started becoming popular. When people on the Internet say something like, 'Just figured out Earl Dibbles is actually a country singer named Granger Smith and I like his music,' that is success. That is exactly what we wanted and it's music to my ears. It's just a huge blessing that it happened that way and it's the result of a lot of hard work and a lot of thought into making silly videos."

Granger also says that Earl's success meant he had to step up with better music and a better show, "otherwise I'll get lost in the Earl project." And he truly has. His last album, *Dirt Road Driveway*, debuted at No. 1 on the iTunes country chart. And his debut single, "Backroad Song," from his new EP, *4x4*, sold more than 32,000 downloads in its first week, entering the iTunes country singles chart at No. 2.

"I'm excited to put out new music because it changes our entire live show," Granger says enthusiastically. "It shoots nitrous into the band. It's so fun!" And *4x4* is a segue to his next album. "*4x4* is a snapshot of the broader picture of what the new album is going to be in the fall," he explains. He's working on the project with one of Nashville's hottest producers and his good friend, Frank Rogers, whom he describes as the "best ears in country music." And the timing of *4x4* is perfect. "This is a group of songs that kind of sit lightheartedly to the listener," he says. "There's nothing in *4x4* that you're going to go, 'I don't really understand what he means,' or 'I'm going to have to dig into this meaning.' They all just kind of groove along and they have strong messages, but they aren't too deep. And that was intentional. That's kind of the essence of what summer festivals and fairs are all about. You can just roll the windows down and turn it up and feel good about it."

TAMMY RAGUSA

TOP 10 BILLBOARD ALBUMS

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	—	DJANGO AND JIMMIE WILLIE NELSON & MERLE HAGGARD
2	1	JEKYLL + HYDE ZAC BROWN BAND
3	—	SUMMER FOREVER BILLY CURRINGTON
4	4	MONTEVALLO SAM HUNT
5	2	JUST AS I AM BRANTLEY GILBERT
6	5	PAIN KILLER LITTLE BIG TOWN
7	6	THE OUTSIDERS ERIC CHURCH
8	7	OLD BOOTS, NEW DIRT JASON ALDEAN
9	3	OUTLAW IN ME THE LACS
10	9	SPRING BREAK ... CHECKIN' OUT LUKE BRYAN



WILLIE NELSON and **MERLE HAGGARD** reach the top for the second time together with their fifth joint project, upping Merle's No. 1 album tally to 16 and Willie's to 14.



FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE scores the seventh *Billboard* Country Airplay chart-topper of their career with the third single—and third No. 1—from their sophomore album.

TOP 10 BILLBOARD SINGLES

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	2	SIPPIN' ON FIRE FLORIDA GEORGIA LINE
2	4	WILD CHILD KENNY CHESNEY WITH GRACE POTTER
3	7	LITTLE TOY GUNS CARRIE UNDERWOOD
4	5	SANGRIA BLAKE SHELTON
5	8	LOVE ME LIKE YOU MEAN IT KELSEA BALLERINI
6	6	BABY BE MY LOVE SONG EASTON CORBIN
7	1	SMOKE A THOUSAND HORSES
8	3	DON'T IT BILLY CURRINGTON
9	9	DIAMOND RINGS AND OLD BARSTOOLS TIM MCGRAW WITH CATHERINE DUNN
10	11	TONIGHT LOOKS GOOD ON YOU JASON ALDEAN

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TOP 5 TRENDING COUNTRY SONGS ON RDIO*

1	TAKE YOUR TIME SAM HUNT
2	SANGRIA BLAKE SHELTON
3	JOHN COUGAR, JOHN DEERE, JOHN 3:16 KEITH URBAN
4	GIRL CRUSH LITTLE BIG TOWN
5	LIKE A WRECKING BALL ERIC CHURCH

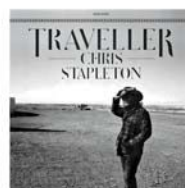
KEITH URBAN's brand-new single pops up at No. 3, while **KACEY MUSGRAVES' 2013** major-label debut and **TAYLOR SWIFT's 2008** release are apparently still on the minds of Rdio users.

SOURCE: **rdio**
*DATA FROM JUNE 15, 2015

TOP 5 TRENDING COUNTRY ALBUMS ON RDIO*

1	SOUTHERNALITY A THOUSAND HORSES
2	SAME TRAILER DIFFERENT PARK KACEY MUSGRAVES
3	FEARLESS TAYLOR SWIFT
4	WELCOME TO CAM COUNTRY CAM
5	FOLKS LIKE US MONTGOMERY GENTRY

TOP 10 AMERICANA AIRPLAY



Another *Traveller* crosses into the Top 10 as former SteelDrivers lead singer Chris Stapleton's debut solo album settles in for the week at No. 6.

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	1	SOUND & COLOR ALABAMA SHAKES
2	4	THE TRAVELING KIND EMMYLOU HARRIS & RODNEY CROWELL
3	3	SECOND HAND HEART DWIGHT YOAKAM
4	2	THE RUFFIAN'S MISFORTUNE RAY WYLIE HUBBARD
5	8	DJANGO AND JIMMIE WILLIE NELSON & MERLE HAGGARD
6	13	TRAVELLER CHRIS STAPLETON
7	6	SUNDOWN OVER GHOST TOWN EILEEN JEWELL
8	5	THE FIREWATCHER'S DAUGHTER BRANDI CARLILE
9	10	THE TRAVELER RHETT MILLER
10	12	SOMETHING IN THE WATER POKEY LAFARGE

TOP 5 CMT VIDEOS

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	2	A GUY WALKS INTO A BAR TYLER FARR
2	4	WILD CHILD KENNY CHESNEY WITH GRACE POTTER
3	3	DON'T IT BILLY CURRINGTON
4	6	SMOKE A THOUSAND HORSES
5	5	LITTLE RED WAGON MIRANDA LAMBERT

SOURCE: CMT

TOP 5 GAC VIDEOS

TW	LW	TITLE / ARTIST
1	1	GIRL CRUSH LITTLE BIG TOWN
2	2	SANGRIA BLAKE SHELTON
3	3	RAISE 'EM UP KEITH URBAN FEAT. ERIC CHURCH
4	—	CRUSHIN' IT BRAD PAISLEY
5	4	TAKE YOUR TIME SAM HUNT

SOURCE: GAC

SOURCE: AMERICANA AIRPLAY CHART

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JON PARDI with Krista Moreland and Carly Tremblay of San Diego



THE CADILLAC THREE with Sarah Starkey of Akron, Ohio



Marisa Koppel of Township, Mich., and Jenny Serrell of Traverse City, Mich., with **KELSEA BALLERINI**



Bob Bresenhan Jr. of Rahway, N.J., with **LARRY GATLIN**



MO PITNEY with Erin Gryniak of Albany, N.Y.



AUSTIN WEBB with Sue Foltz of Lewistown, Pa.

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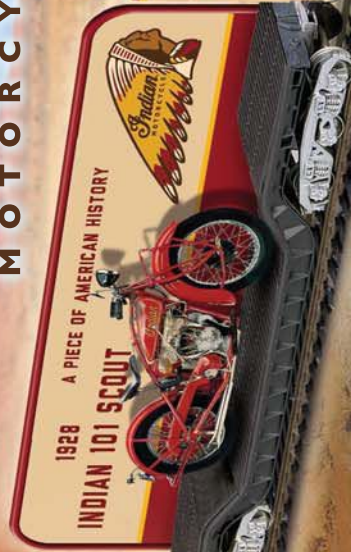
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- b.** Put Your Soul in It
- c.** Put Your Heart and Soul in It

a. Kelsea Ballerini

b. Kelleigh Bannen

e. Cam



a. Chris Stapleton

b. Jason Isbell

e. Sturgill Simpson



- a.** Smoke
- b.** Dust
- c.** Dirt

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A photograph of three country music artists. On the left is a man with a tan cowboy hat and a patterned shirt. In the center is a woman with blonde hair, wearing a pink cowboy hat and a dark patterned shirt. On the right is a man with a black cowboy hat and a dark shirt. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera.

**a. Keith
Anderson**

b. Lynn Anderson

c. John Anderson

a. Waylon Jennings

b. George Jones

c. Conway Twitty



a. Madonna **b. Paul McCartney** **c. Kanye West**

a. Madonna

b. Paul McCartney

c. Kanye West

his or her honor?



a. Dolly Parton

b. Johnny Cash

c. Reba McEntire

***a.* Dolly Parton**

b. Johnny Cash

c. Reba McEntire

ANSWERS: 1-b; 2-c; 3-a; 4-b; 5-c; 6-b; 7-a; 8-a

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Tyler Andrews

is a "damn Yankee," a Northerner who refuses to go home. He loves biscuits, hot chicken and his Southern belle wife.

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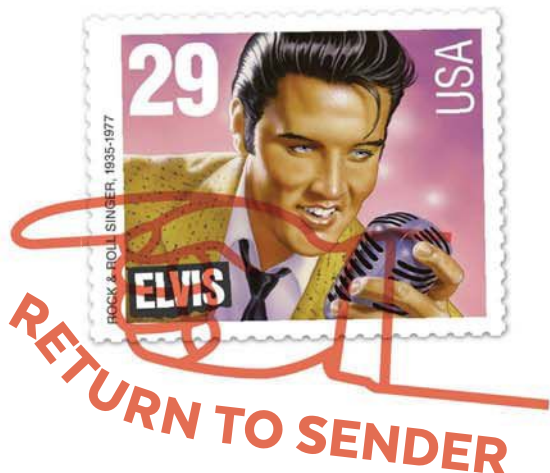
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DID YOU KNOW?

Elvis Presley had a hit single in 1962 with "Return to Sender." Thirty years later life imitated art when the U.S. Postal Service issued a commemorative Elvis stamp, which many people used on letters with deliberately invalid addresses so that they would receive them back marked "return to sender."



"The pot issue—how many country songs have you heard about moonshine? Can we be more hypocritical? And like, I get it. To each their own, and if you don't know a lot about the subject it may be something that is fearful to you. But there's nothing to be scared of. It just happens to be illegal in a majority of the states. But the laws are changing and I think a lot of people's minds will, too, whenever it's legal. I don't understand how alcohol and pills, controlled substances, are legal—things that ruin people's lives every single day—but a plant that's been here for millions of years before any of us even walked on this earth is illegal. It raises an eyebrow for me."

KACEY MUSGRAVES



"Ross Copperman and Shane McAnally produced my new album, and they are amazing, but I want to stick up for them in a sense. I've heard people in Nashville say, 'These songwriters that have a few hits all of the sudden think they are producers.' I don't know what the definition in someone's mind is of what a producer is, but to me, a producer is someone who can produce impactful songs and leave a mark, and someone who's not scared to step outside the boundaries of what's normal. I think the best part of Ross and Shane is that they are open to trying anything and they listen to me as an artist and what I want to say and don't want to say. They pushed me to step outside my comfort zone to make me better. It's been a great experience."

JAKE OWEN

**Guess Who!
by the Numbers**

- 2** BILLBOARD NO. 1 ALBUMS
- 3** CMT MUSIC AWARDS
- 5** AMERICAN IDOL SEASON
- 8** USO TOURS
- 16** DANCING WITH THE STARS SEASON
- 32** TURN TO THIS PAGE



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